

Bike-Walk Alliance of New Hampshire
May 2025 Podcast Transcript
(Transcription completed by AI)

00:06

Amanda Gourgue

Hi and welcome to the Bike Walk alliance of New Hampshire Podcast. I am your host, Amanda Gourgue and I'm also the Executive Director. Today is a really special episode because it is our first one. The goal of this podcast is to enhance our mission of educating, advocating and celebrating all things that have to do with bike and pedestrian safety, but in an entertaining way. Today it is my pleasure to introduce you to Jen Dodge. Not only is she a Bike Walk alliance of New Hampshire board member, but she is a victim of a car crash while riding her bike on a group ride. She will share her story of ups and downs with you. Her crash happened on August 19, 2014.

00:57

Amanda Gourgue

Since then, she has started a blog called Confessions of a Concussed Cyclist as a form of therapy for herself, but also to help others. She is a certified special education teacher and an advice cyclist. Jen uses her own story to encourage people to become informed about brain injuries and to be kind to cyclists and sharing the road. Please visit her blog at Confessionsofconcussedcyclist.com after that we will talk about a very important group ride happening this Wednesday, May 21st. It is the Ride of Silence. This ride exists to honor bicyclists injured or killed by motorists, to promote sharing the road and to prevent awareness of bicycling safety. Jen is hosting the only organized ride within New Hampshire, but anyone can go out and ride in memory. I hope you listened to the segment and learned more about this essential event. I hope you enjoy this podcast and thank you for listening.

02:10

Amanda Gourgue

Welcome to the very first episode of our Bike Walk alliance of New Hampshire podcast. Thank you for being here. We're so lucky to have you.

02:35

Jen Dodge

Thanks for having me.

02:39

Amanda Gourgue

So today I would love for you to talk about who you are and as people have already heard, you are a victim of a bike accident or bike crash. My apologies. I know they're crashes, not accidents and I would, you know, want to make sure people learn your story. So can you tell us all about Jen?

03:03

Jen Dodge

Sure. So prior to getting my bike crash, I was a special education teacher and that's what I just wanted to do with my. I always knew I wanted to be a special ed teacher. I got into cycling in 2010. My brother handed me a road bike and said give it a whirl and I absolutely fell in love with it. In August. I'm sorry. August 19, 2014, I was on a group bike ride that left from Gorham, New Hampshire and were traveling through the towns around there and when we got to Berlin, New Hampshire, the next town over, I was hit by a woman driving an SUV. She crossed into my lane and tried to turn onto a side street, and she. She hit me.

04:06

Jen Dodge

I. I do not actually remember the impact, but I do remember that leading up to it, I knew she was going to hit

me. And I was screaming at her to stop. And I was trying to stop myself. And I had just seconds to assess the situation. And I realized that if I kept going straight, she was going to hit me head on. And I couldn't try and go around her because there was another vehicle there. So my only option was to try and turn my bike with her car. And that is what saved my life. So I remember thinking, she's going to hit me. I remember thinking, this is going to hurt. And I remember screaming at her to stop. And then the next thing I remember is opening my eyes and I was under her SUV, looking up at her exhaust.

05:03

Jen Dodge

I was still clipped into my bike. You know, my feet were clipped into the pedals. And thankfully, because it was a group ride, there was other riders behind me, and they saw the whole thing. So they. They came over, they unclipped my feet, kind of dragged me out from under the car, carried me over to the sidewalk, and so began a complete. You know, my world completely changed. Nothing. I had no broken bones from the impact, but the. The way the impact happened, it rattled my brain in all areas. So I literally have damage to all areas of my brain. And I was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury from this. I had to stop teaching. I tried, I fought with all I had to continue teaching, and it just was not. It wasn't an option to keep in that field. So I have.

06:08

Jen Dodge

You know, August will be 11 years that I've now been living with a head injury.

06:17

Amanda Gourgue

Sorry to hear that.

06:18

Jen Dodge

I'm think.

06:19

Amanda Gourgue

Thank you so much for sharing your story. How so? I'm just gonna spoil. You have a blog. You have a blog, which I have read several times. I find it fascinating. Can you. And I don't know if remember this part, but your very first blog entry after you got hit was December 11th, I believe, of 2014.

06:44

Jen Dodge

Yep. So it. I was just sitting in my living room, and all of a sudden this title of Confessions of a Concussed Cyclist came to me, and I was like, well, I got to do something about that. I can't just have this wonderful title come to me and not do anything. And so I wrote a confession, and I started off by just sharing it to a few people on Facebook. That was. That was it. And then a little bit later, I wrote a second confession. So kind of the way it played out was after some time, I felt comfortable enough where I allowed all my Facebook friends to read these. And then after a little more time, I felt more comfortable making them public so anybody on Facebook could read them. And then after.

07:38

Jen Dodge

After a little more time, I felt really pulled to actually create, like, a true blog. And so I bought the. And created the domain of Confessions of a Concussed Cyclist. This. This is mine. And I transferred everything that I had written over on to this blog website, and. And now I just keep adding to it. So it. You know, the first. It kind of started for a few reasons. One of them was, of course, the title. Like I said, it just came to me, and I had to do something with it. Some of it was I needed a place to vent about what had happened and how

my life had changed so drastically. Some of it was about educating people about head injuries and what that entails.

08:36

Jen Dodge

And then also some of it was if the woman that hit me, if she ever looked me up, if you ever Googled my name, I wanted this to be the first thing that showed up, and I wanted her to read what happened to me, and it was all because of her actions. And so that was really the driving force or forces behind me doing this.

09:01

Amanda Gourgue

I just want to say, wow. So have you. I have a ton of questions. One of them, have you ever gone back. Do you reread them? Do you edit them, or do you just, like, let the post go and you just.

09:19

Jen Dodge

I let it go. I do reread them occasionally. So March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, and I'm constantly posting during the month of March, and sometimes I will post an old confession that I had written. So in that case, I'll reread them to make sure that's the confession that I want to share. But I made the decision a while ago to never edit them. And so, for example, in the early confessions, you'll see that I called this an accident. And a friend of mine very politely told me never to call this an accident. And he explained why. And accident insinuates that nobody is at fault. And that really stuck with me, and I agreed with him. But I never went back to those early confessions and changed it, changed the wording. And that was intentional, I want.

10:16

Jen Dodge

You know, because it literally shows the growth and in the change, and, you know, even my writing style, like you can kind of see it all evolve. And I just decided to leave it that way.

10:28

Amanda Gourgue

That.

10:28

Jen Dodge

That. What I wrote on that day when I posted it was, you know, exactly how I was feeling in that moment. And I don't ever want to go back and change any of that wording.

10:40

Amanda Gourgue

I don't blame you. No, I mean, it's powerful too, to be like, this is how I was feeling. This is, this is, I mean, your first post alone, I don't want to call it a rant, but it is definitely like, I don't know what to say.

10:59

Jen Dodge

It's like I look at it as denial because even in that first post I'm like, I'm just going to rest and I'm going to be back at it full force next summer, rocketing my bike. And that's not what happened. So even then you can kind of see some denial about the severity of what happened. And some of them I'm angry at, some of them. I've even written letters to the driver because this was the only way that I could get out some of this anger about what happened. And some of them are just, I'm very frustrated. And then others are just, hey, you know, I just want to put this out there. And some of them are just, you know, just, here's my new reality. And it's whatever comes to me. I never force a blog a confession. It's.

11:50

Jen Dodge

If something is weighing heavy on me or I really am feeling pulled to address it, then I do, but I don't give myself a. Well, hey, it's been a few months. You need to post something. I don't do any of that. It's just as it comes to me and as I want to discuss it, then I write. There are still topics that I have never written about regarding what happened. You know, me being hit regarding long term medical issues that I have as a result of being hit. And it's quite possible that I'll never write confessions about those certain topics. But, you know, it's. Yeah, it's just kind of take it as it comes.

12:38

Amanda Gourgue

I can see that. Yeah. I mean, you mentioned in this very first one about like your acupuncture or, you know, therapy. So how have I assuming the blog has been a form of therapy? Can you talk about how and not about the crash itself, but like how you move on? How do you. Do you forgive the driver? Like how. What are, how do you process all of this?

13:03

Jen Dodge

Yeah, so I was very much in denial for years about what this new reality was for me. I was very much like, nope, nope, everything's going to go back to normal. It's going to be Fine, I'll show my brain who's boss. And it took a very long time for me to accept that's not how this world works. So shortly after being hit, I was diagnosed with PTSD. And even that diagnosis I had a hard time with because, you know, all I'd ever heard was PTSD associated with veterans. And I felt very strongly that what a veteran has gone through is I'm not even on the same playing field. Like, you cannot possibly compare these two things. And that was my logic. And a very kind doctor explained to me that it's something traumatic.

13:53

Jen Dodge

It's not just somebody who's gone to war or anything like that. It's something traumatic. And so even then, after the PTSD diagnosis came along, I was still very much in denial about it, and very much like, nope, I'm not addressing this. I'll just keep plugging along. I'll keep doing my thing. And a couple years ago, it was brought to my attention that what you're doing is not working and you desperately need to address the PTSD. And so I went into trauma therapy, and I have consistently been going for a few years now. And it is the hardest thing, I'm not going to lie. It is so hard to really dig deep inside and address what you're going through and how to cope with that and how to move forward. And part of the trauma therapy that I'm in now, we do what's called EMDR.

14:55

Jen Dodge

And so you're asked over and over again to think about this traumatic event. And the idea is that you're going to become desensitized to it. But in the process, over and over again, I'm asked to think about being hit and being stuck under an SUV and things like that. And it's. It's draining. It is very hard, you know, so that's. That's part of how I'm hoping is that I do still use my blog. But you'll notice, you know, for years, there was a lot of blogs very close together, and then you'll notice that they started spreading out. And that's when I entered trauma therapy, and I didn't need to rely on this blog so much anymore to kind of process my situation, because I was talking to a professional about it. And so you see that they're kind of spread out.

15:56

Jen Dodge

They're not as often. So that's. That it is very much a work in progress to continue working through this. Regarding the anger towards the driver, I still very much have a lot of Anger, especially on days where my head just does not want to function and I can't even get out of bed. And it's beautiful, it's warm, it's sunny. I

want to go outside. I want to go for a bike ride. I want to go hang out with friends or family, and I can't function. And those are the days I get very angry at her. But years ago, somebody made a comment to me and said, you, anger is just hurting yourself because she has no idea that you're angry at her. So, you know, and it did make me reflect on day to day not holding on to that anger at this.

16:55

Jen Dodge

But it was also very much a situation of there was never an apology. There was never any recognition of her actions and how they affected my world. There wasn't a lawsuit. There wasn't a court hearing. There was literally nothing. And that was really hard for me to accept that because of her actions, my whole world flipped. And, you know, I didn't know how to not be angry at this person.

17:27

Amanda Gourgue

I get that. So when you write. I think Your first one's August 19th of 2016, and you write to the driver, do you think those are your way of processing that closure if there's no way to talk to this person? Because the first time we spoke about it, you said that there was. She was kind of flippant towards, like, she blamed me.

17:49

Jen Dodge

She was. Yeah, she was. Literally. So I will. I will say that right after I opened my eyes and I, you know, I'm under her car, I did start swearing. And literally the first thing she said was, could you watch your mouth? Not an, oh, my goodness, I hit you. It was a, could you watch your mouth? And I couldn't believe that was it. And then she started walking around, knocking on doors, asking neighbors if they had seen what had happened. And I'm still under her vehicle. And that blew my mind. And so I'm sorry, I completely forgot your question, Amanda.

18:30

Amanda Gourgue

No, that's okay. It was. Do you think writing these letters are your way of closing this chapter and trying to move forward?

18:39

Jen Dodge

Yeah, it is. So I did request to be able to talk with her when all was said and done, and I was told that there could be no communication. And so there. I was never given that opportunity for her to apologize or for me to say, look what you did. Look what happened to my world. And so, again, if she ever Googled me, I hope. And I hope she did, or I hope she does at some point, and she sees this, and this is the closest I can ever get of letting her know what happened. And I hope she sees those confessions. And I, you know, I hope she sees again what her actions did. So this is all I have is this blog. This is the only thing I can use to kind of get some of that out there.

19:31

Amanda Gourgue

But, you know, as you read your blog and you get a bunch of comments from people who've been in similar situations and who have appreciated what you're saying, and they can relate, guys can all, like, it's this kind of new community. Have you been. I mean, have people reached out to you? Have you been able to help others, like, tell us.

19:57

Jen Dodge

It's really pretty cool. I will say that. So when I started the Actual Confessions of a concussed cyclist.com, one of the things this website gives you is stats on what. What countries have read your blog. And I find that

so fascinating because in my head, it's still just people like friends and family reading it, and it's not. It's strangers from all over the world reading this, which is. It really is pretty cool. And I've struck up some friendships through this. Random strangers finding it, reading it, messaging me, and then we just start chatting. And it's really pretty cool. And even people that have never experienced a head injury or being hit or anything like that, but just people saying, oh, my goodness, thank you for sharing your story. Like, thank you for informing me, you know, and, you know, thank you for teaching me.

20:59

Jen Dodge

And so that, to me, is so rewarding. And every. Every once in a while, I have a moment of like, do I need to keep renewing this domain? Like, do I really want to take the money for it? And then that only lasts for about 30 seconds. And I'm like, yeah, I'm never letting go of Confessions of a Confessed cyclist dot com. Even if I ever get to a point in my life where I stop adding to it, that title alone means so much to me. And then the fact that, yeah, random people stumble upon it, Read it helps them. I've had spouses read it and say, oh, my gosh, because of this, I understand my spouse's head injury better. And that. That's. That's huge. And I will. That is such a. Trying to find a silver lining in everything that happened.

21:51

Jen Dodge

And this is one of those silver linings. Like, I will hang on to that.

21:55

Amanda Gourgue

Yeah, I mean, you've been featured in a bunch of magazines dealing with brain injury. That's gotta feel rewarding, I guess.

22:04

Jen Dodge

Yeah, it's very cool. Yeah, I've been published a few times, and that it's very cool.

22:14

Amanda Gourgue

So, obviously, you can't go back and change the past, but what would you like to see happen in the future? How do you. How can we avoid crashes? Or what would you like to see as someone who's experienced it and know now? Well, let's actually take a step back for a second. Let's talk about Bike Walk alliance of New Hampshire. You are now on the board. Congratulations for that.

22:37

Jen Dodge

Thanks.

22:38

Amanda Gourgue

Now you're in a spot where you can make some progress and make change. So, first of all, how did you get involved with Bike Walk Alliance? And then let's talk about what you want to see happen.

22:53

Jen Dodge

So another board member, a fellow board member named Bruce, had reached out to me and asked me if I wanted to join the board. I. I know Bruce because we live in the same area, and he comes into the bike shop all the time. And I told him that I was interested, but I had concerns that I didn't. You know, I was. You know, my head injury. I didn't know if I could give to the board everything that they would want of a board member. And he. He, in a very kind way, said, I think that's why you need to be on the board, is you are

coming to the board bringing something that nobody else has. You have been in the thick of it, and the rest of us can only imagine what that is like.

23:38

Jen Dodge

And that, to me was like, okay, like, this is the right decision then to join the board and hopefully try and be a part of change. So, you know, I. And I remember, you know, there's kind of like a kind of a impromptu, informal interview type thing about what before you are officially voted into the board. And I made the comment of, you know, I've never been on a board before. I'm not sure what I bring to it, but I have a willingness to shout from the rooftops to share the road with cyclists. And the board was like, great. Like, that's. That's plenty. You bring that to the board. So I would love to see change. I would love to see drivers held responsible for their actions, because unfortunately, especially in our country, they aren't.

24:33

Jen Dodge

It is incredibly easy to injure or kill a cyclist and get away with it, and I would love to see change there. I would love to see drivers held accountable for their actions. I am all about teaching cyclists what their obligations are and how they need to follow the rules of the road also. And really, I would love for people to look at cyclists as people. We're not A nuisance. We're not setting out to ruin your day by slowing you down for a few seconds. We're just trying to do something that we love. And so look at us as people.

25:22

Amanda Gourgue

Can I ask a question? Just kind of following up what you just said, because I'm obviously still learning about this topic and you made a comment that it's hard to hold people who injure cyclists, it's hard to hold them accountable. So why that?

25:43

Jen Dodge

Well, for a couple reasons. One of them, if the cyclist is killed, they're not there to tell you what actually happened. And the driver is the first person to say, well, the cyclist did xyz. And the cyclist is blamed in my situation because again, there's just no. I mean, it's coming, the change is coming. It's painfully slow, but it is coming. But in my situation with a woman that hit me, the only way she would have faced any charges is if I personally filed them and if I personally paid the court costs. And I was facing hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills. I was facing losing my job. I was facing not even sure how I was going to pay rent next month.

26:30

Jen Dodge

And it was not in the cards even cognitively to wrap my head around the fact that I was responsible for this, but financially I couldn't do it. And so it blows my mind that, and that is one of the first questions so many people ask is, what happened to the driver that hit you? Was she held responsible? And she wasn't. And I would love to see change there as well. You can't go around injuring people without a consequence. That's just not how our society should be functioning. And again, it is slowly happening here, but in this country, but it is painfully slow, cyclists are still very much viewed as a nuisance. It blows my mind that drivers literally feel like they can tap a cyclist to express that they're frustrated that you're there.

27:25

Jen Dodge

You can't tap a cyclist when you're driving a vehicle like this. Look at your safety features in your vehicle versus we're on a 20 pound bike in Lycra. Like, we don't have safety features. And just really, I don't know. I would just love to see change there. I would love to see drivers not so angry at us. I mean, I've had food and drinks thrown at me. I've had people swear at me. I've had people purposely drive in front of me and then

pull right in front of me so I have to slam on the brakes like it's insane. The Hate that cyclists get out there just because an individual feels like you're a nuisance or that you shouldn't be on the road.

28:11

Amanda Gourgue

That's crazy. No, of course not. I mean, so for the listeners who don't know me, I am not a cyclist. I'm not a biker. I'm a runner. So I can still feel the pain of what Jen's going through, but I didn't realize, let me say, that it was. I have not had food thrown at me from a moving car. That's horrible.

28:34

Jen Dodge

Can you imagine? Like, yeah, like, I. The last century that I was ever able to do, somebody literally went by and threw a full, like, Big Gulp slushy at my back. And I was only about 20 miles into the ride, so I had another 80 miles to go of sticky slushy dripping down my back. Because whatever reason these people were angry that I was out there, that blows my mind. I just can't imagine hating somebody and you don't even know them. You have no reason. You're just literally seeing a person on a bike and you. There's rage there. And it absolutely blows my mind.

29:17

Amanda Gourgue

It's also incredibly wasteful. Beverage. Why would you throw it at somebody?

29:23

Jen Dodge

I'm like, that's what you came up with to do with your slushie. You just bought it to drink it, and instead you decided to huck it at a person that you've never met, never see again. Because you want to express, like, you know, that you're. You're angry at this person, that it. It's absurd. You know, my friend Ellen and I, we ride together a lot, and every time a car. I always phrase it, that they're. They've hugged us, that they're, you know, they did not move over. They're hugging us. And she's like, why? Like, she. She'll always just say, why? Like, why can't you just be a kind human being and move over? Like, how does that hurt you to move over? And. And that's. That's the perfect way to look at it.

30:06

Jen Dodge

Like, how does it hurt you to slow down for just a few seconds and move over and spare my life in my safety? It doesn't hurt you. You know, so I. I do still ride after getting hit, but I'm. I'm petrified to ride. My heart is pounding the whole entire time. I don't feel safe. Anytime a car goes by, if they're too loud, they're too close, anything, I completely panic even more. But at the same time, there's such A stubborn part of me that says, I'm not going to let the drivers win, that I'm not going to let you bully me off the road. But there's always that little part of me in the back where the doctors told me, you're not going to survive getting hit again.

30:52

Jen Dodge

And there's always that fear of, am I going to make it back from this ride today? And every single time I get on my bike, I have that thought, am I going to make it back after this? And. And then when you add to it that there's so many angry drivers out there, you just have to wonder, like, you know, where does this anger get you? When I'm. I'm just doing something that I'm. I'm trying to love. I'm trying to get back to loving it. I'm trying to get back to enjoying it as much as I used to. I'm not hurting you. But there's. There's so much anger towards cyclists.

31:28

Amanda Gourgue

I was gonna ask if you can get back on your bike. So that's good. It's probably part of your therapy, too, to, like, help you not necessarily move forward, but accept. Accept and move forward.

31:39

Jen Dodge
Right?

31:39

Amanda Gourgue
Like, you just continue to live your life the way you want to. So that.

31:43

Jen Dodge

That it was. It was very important to me to get back on the bike as soon as. So, a couple major symptoms when I was first hit was I was extremely dizzy. I could not see, sit up. I. If I was walking to a room, I needed to have my head, like, up against the wall as I walked to the next room, and my legs were, like, absolute jello. I didn't have, like. I had a hard time just supporting myself. But it was very important to me that when I could. That I got back on a bike because I didn't want to be afraid. And I have the best group of friends that they literally would form, like, bubbles around me and we would take over a whole entire lane.

32:27

Jen Dodge

I'm in the middle, and I've got people completely surrounding me on their bikes just so I could get out riding again. So that was. That was huge. And. And it did get me back out there, but that fear has never gone away. And I think that. I think that cyclists can tend to have, like, a Superman complex of. Well, I know it may happen, but it's never going to happen to. And then it did happen to me. And so that it is a reality. And so every single time I go out there, like I said, there's that question of, am I gonna make it back and so shortly after my PTSD diagnosis, I, I was paired with a psychologist and who specializes in PTSD and her approach is exposure. So I will never forget my first appointment with her.

33:26

Jen Dodge

And she's like, okay, we're going to get you back on the bike. And I'm like, I'm already on the bike. And she goes, oh. And I'm like, well, I'm very afraid, but I'm on the bike. And she literally was like, I don't know what to do for you then, because this is my approach is we would have worked on getting you back on the bike. And so that was like a one and done appointment, never to go back again because she flat out admitted she wasn't sure what to. What to do with this. But it, you know, for me, it helps. Riding with friends, you know, just some comfort there, a little bit of a distraction, friends chatting with you're. You're not in your head quite as much.

34:07

Jen Dodge

And this is also something that we work on in trauma therapy as well, is you're out there, you're riding, you really start panicking. Where, you know, we work on what is my reaction, because my reaction had been to turn around and beeline it back home. And that's not the healthiest reaction. So we're, you know, we've worked on different approaches and things like that, but ultimately it really does, you know, people are always like, oh, be safe. Have a good ride. And I'm like, can you tell the drivers to be safe? Because I am safe as a cyclist, but I need to know that the people around me in vehicles are safe as well.

34:43

Amanda Gourgue

Definitely. Out of curiosity, I mean, do you have, I guess, goals to work towards? How do you keep moving in that direction of healing?

35:00

Jen Dodge

Yeah, there's. Good question. There are so many factors to PTSD and to. And it's fascinating to me how everything can. Every single thing that I experience can literally be tied back to me being hit. So, for example, I have a very hard time feeling safe in situations and in places and it can all be tied back to. Well, I was put in a position where I wasn't safe and there was absolutely nothing that I could do to stop that. Everything can be tied back. And so we just keep plugging along and it's, you know, my current trauma therapist is amazing. It's all at my pace, it's all at my comfort. There's never a moment of like, no, we have to discuss this right this second. And so we just keep working on it.

35:59

Jen Dodge

And as something else comes up or something else is weighing heavier on me, then that's. That's what we focus on. And we just keep. We just keep working at it.

36:12

Amanda Gourgue

Amazing. Is there something that. Like, what's on your. What are you working towards right now?

36:20

Jen Dodge

Right now is very much feeling safe. I, unfortunately, am in the process of moving, and I'm having a very hard time with having to leave my home that I have made safe, you know, and going to a new place is. Is very upsetting to me. And so we've kind of halted on the EMDR and the reprocessing of the actual crash. And we're. We are strictly focusing on what can we do to make me feel safe during this move, of. Of leaving this apartment that I've made a safe place and going to a place that. That is very scary for me. So that's what we're focusing on right now. Before this move came about, were. We're still working on processing and reprocessing the actual day of, you know, my emotions on that day, what happened, things like that. So.

37:27

Jen Dodge

And then, like I said, it just kind of ebbs and flows of what I. What I need. Interesting. Yeah.

37:34

Amanda Gourgue

I never thought about. I mean, we all hate moving, and just in life in general, like, I joke, I say I'm gonna die in this house that I currently live because I hate moving so much. So I can imagine for anyone, it's traumatic, but for somebody who has built a cozy little home and you feel safe there. Although someone on the other side might say, well, you're getting a fresh start. I don't know.

38:04

Jen Dodge

I mean, and I. I can understand that people think that, but until you've been in a moment where there are things that are crossing my mind about this new place I'm moving to, that wouldn't. Your average person wouldn't even think of them being an issue. But part of that PTSD brain is you're constantly on the lookout for what can go wrong, and you want to think 10 steps ahead to keep yourself safe and protected. And so, you know, literally, again, things that are freaking me out that I'm panicking about at this new place, your average person would not even consider it. So, yeah, put it, you know, adding, you know, we all know what it's like to pack. We all know what it's like to move. We all know that it's stressful and it's time intensive and things like that.

38:54

Jen Dodge

But then there's a whole new element too, when your brain can. Can very easily Convince you that you're not safe. And you have to battle that all the time. It's, It's. It's very tricky, and it's very draining to. To live that way.

39:12

Amanda Gourgue

Oh, yeah. I mean, I almost said I can imagine. No, I can't imagine, but I empathize and think it's hard enough for a person without a traumatic experience in their life, then I can only imagine then with something so challenging, then, yeah, it's something I think probably we all take advantage of and we don't realize, and it's hard to empathize and put yourself into someone else's shoes.

39:40

Jen Dodge

Absolutely. And it's the same with a head injury. You know, I. Like I said, I was a special ed teacher before, and I used to think that end of school year, teacher tired was a whole different level of tired. And now I look at, man, that was a cakewalk compared to how tired you are with a head injury. That things that I used to think were difficult really weren't. Things that maybe concerned me before are not so amplified now. And until you experience it, like, you truly cannot understand what that person is. Is going through. This is just a whole new world. And I'm. I mean, yes, I'm almost 11 years into it, but I am literally still learning how to. How to live it, because just when I think I've got it figured out, then there's another twist in the road and I've.

40:35

Jen Dodge

And I've got to figure that out next.

40:38

Amanda Gourgue

Well, I'm also. I'm sure that the 11 years doesn't feel like 11 years. It probably just felt like it was yesterday. Right?

40:44

Jen Dodge

I mean, well, so there's a part of me that, yes, says, oh, my gosh, It's. It's almost 11 years. And then there's a part of me that feels like it's been 60 years. That. And I. And I often am like, I can't. You know, we'll use 11 years. Okay. It's almost been 11 years. I can't do this for another 11 years. This is so hard. And. But what's the alternative? You know, so you keep going. But, yeah, so there. There are moments where I'm like, man, like, okay, time kind of flew and then there. But a bigger part of me says, oh, my gosh, it's only been 11 years. Like, I feel like I've been doing this forever. So. Yeah. Yeah.

41:29

Amanda Gourgue

Well, I guess. I mean, as you know, I could talk to you for hours, but because your story is fascinating and I'm hoping that we're helping people and you're helping me. You know, the education that I get when I talk to you is fabulous.

41:47

Jen Dodge

Yeah.

41:48

Amanda Gourgue

And so I guess to wrap it up, I would say, you know, what do you want our listeners to know? And you know, how do you, what should someone get out of our conversation?

42:02

Jen Dodge

You know, one of the things that I really hang on to is, you know, you don't know anyone's story. So to look at me, you would have no idea that I have a head injury. You would have no idea that I'm battling with PTSD. I can fake it, I can smile, I can try and carry myself really well. Just be kind. You have no idea what somebody's going through. And for the cyclist end of it, I love the phrase of pass them like you love them. So when you see a cyclist out there, pass them like you love them, pass them like that is your husband or your wife or your mother or your father, brother, sister, kids, whatever. Because we're just all trying to get back home to the people that we love and.

42:52

Jen Dodge

But we need help of drivers to keep us safe out there.

42:57

Amanda Gourgue

Oh my gosh, I love that. That is such a wonderful. I hadn't heard that. So that's wonderful to keep in the back of our heads.

43:05

Jen Dodge

Yes, that is, like I said, that is one of my favorite things is pass them like you love them and just be kind to people on a day to day basis. You truly have no idea. Like, you know, so many people have said to me, you don't look like you have a head injury. I'm still not positive what that means I'm supposed to look. I don't, I don't know if they think I'm supposed to be sitting in a corner drooling or I have no idea what they think. So just be kind to somebody because we're all going through stuff and in my situation, like I am labeled as disabled, but you wouldn't know it by looking at me. You have no idea the damage that's been done to my brain from this impact. So just be kind to people.

43:55

Amanda Gourgue

I think that's a wonderful place to end this. I completely agree. The world needs a lot more kindness for a variety of reasons. So I think if we all had that in our heads every day with everybody, the world would be a lot better.

44:12

Jen Dodge

Yeah, I mean, you know, not to be morbid, but we are all, literally anything could happen in the blink of an eye. You know, I did not strike out on August 19, 2014 on that bike ride, thinking I was going to be hit, and it happened. And so just kind of keep that in mind as you're. As you're dealing with people and what they're going through. Like, in the blink of an eye, something could completely change. And so just be kind and patient to people out there.

44:45

Amanda Gourgue

I love the messages that you share. I do encourage everybody to take a look at this blog and everyone to be kinder to one another. I think that's. I mean, that's what I'm gonna get out of this.

44:58

Jen Dodge

Just be kind and move over and share the road. Like, if we could just get people to do those two things for me, I feel like the world would be such a better place. But yes, I. Goodness.

45:13

Amanda Gourgue

Well, thank you, Jen, for talking and sharing your story. I really appreciate it. Is there a way, if somebody. Obviously, we're gonna share the link to your blog, Is there a way for someone to reach out to you, or should they just comment on the blog? Like, what are. What. How do you.

45:29

Jen Dodge

How do people reach you?

45:31

Amanda Gourgue

They can.

45:32

Jen Dodge

Typically people have been commenting on the blog, and then from there I can privately message you. There's not a way for you to initiate that private contact first, but if you literally comment on any post, I immediately get a notification. And if you are say, hey, I'd love to chat, I can then privately send you an email and we can start that conversation. Many other people have done it that way and I. I'm all about chatting with anybody. It's amazing how many other cyclists I've met through that blog that have also been hit. And there's this. This sounds so awful because I. I wouldn't wish this life on anybody. But there also is comfort in knowing that other people can understand your. Your situation and what you're going through. So, yeah, commenting on it. And then like I said, I can.

46:27

Jen Dodge

I can send a private message from there.

46:29

Amanda Gourgue

That's wonderful. Yes. I encourage everyone to reach out and just. Even if it's just to say thank you, I think your blog and you're all amazing. So I. Aww.

46:39

Jen Dodge

Thank you.

46:41

Amanda Gourgue

Yeah. Awesome. All right, well, thank you, Jen, for being here. I really appreciate it.

46:45

Jen Dodge

Thank you so much. Amanda.

46:56

Amanda Gourgue

Isn't Jen amazing? She has been through so much, but is still able to help others. Please don't hesitate to reach out to her or to Bike Walk alliance of New Hampshire with any questions or thoughts. Also, her blog

web address again is confessionsofaconcussedcyclist.com so you might have noticed that we aren't sponsored by anyone and we don't have any ads. Well, we are going to plug one of our own events. As you may know, May is National Bike Month and we are hosting our second annual Bike to New Hampshire. These coordinated rides that happen around the state throughout the month of May and the first half of June. These tours are all about inclusivity and welcoming cyclists of all ages, backgrounds and experience levels.

47:50

Amanda Gourgue

Whether you are riding solo with friends or with a whole family, there is something for everyone to enjoy and to feel part of the cycling community. From rolling hills to serene lake shores, each rail trail offers a unique charm. Discover hidden gems and breathtaking views as you pedal through New Hampshire's diverse landscapes. Don't worry if you're new to cycling or haven't been on a bike in years. Experience Guides will provide tips on bike handling, safety practices, and how to make the most of a rail trail experience. Our tours are not just about cycling, but also about learning, discovering the rich history of railroads that once traversed these trails. Knowledgeable guides will share fascinating stories about the evolution of these routes, enriching your understanding of the region's past.

48:48

Amanda Gourgue

Bike Walk alliance of New Hampshire is proud to partner with organizations like the Upper Valley E Bike Initiative, Vermont Sierra Club, Treeline Outfitters, Seacoast Area Bike Riders, the Seacoast Greenway, Granite State Wheelers, Friends of the Salem Bike Pedestrian Corridor, New Boston Rail Trail Committee, QC Bike Collective, Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative, Friends of the Northern Rail Trail, Francis Town, Old Meeting House, and the Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail to promote cycling and outdoor recreation in our communities. Together, we are creating opportunities for people to connect with nature and lead active, healthy lifestyles. To learn more about these rides or to sign up, please visit bwanh.org.

49:50

Jen Dodge

TOR.

49:51

Amanda Gourgue

T O U R2025 with that said, thank you for listening so far and please stay with us to hear more about the Riot of Silence. Okay, so let's switch gears and talk about the Ride of Silence. Jen, can you tell me how this came about?

50:26

Jen Dodge

Yeah so the Ride of Silence was started in 2003 after an endurance cyclist by the name of Larry Schwartz was hit by the mirror of a passing bus and Larry was killed on that ride. The Ride of Silence is the third Wednesday in May every single year. I found out about the ride in 2019, but by the time I found out about it, I was too late to the game to actually register. So I registered for the ride in 2020, and at that point I learned that this was the only public ride in the state of New Hampshire. There is a gentleman in the southern part of the state that does ride, but he rides by himself and he doesn't want to host an actual ride, like a public ride.

51:20

Jen Dodge

So we've been, or I have been doing it since 2020, which was an interesting year. That was the COVID year. And so the very first year we actually weren't allowed to host a group. We had to ride individually. But starting in 2021, people started showing up for it. That's really interesting.

51:41

Amanda Gourgue

Thank you for that background. What happens on this ride?

51:49

Jen Dodge

So the ride is meant to be short and slow and silent. It is. They give us parameters for, you know, no faster than 12 miles per hour, for example. It is meant to be reflective. And the organization exists to honor those that have been injured or killed while cycling on public roadways to raise awareness that cyclists are here and we have a right to be here. And we are asking others to share the road with us. So regardless of where you live, the third Wednesday of May at 7pm this ride starts. It is up to each organizer exactly what route you take and exactly your distance. But again, it's not meant to be fast and it's not meant to be long. There's a little, you know, spiel before it starts that they have provided us with, that they asked us to share with everybody.

52:56

Jen Dodge

And then, you know, I always say, are there any questions? Answer all the questions. And then I say, silence starts now. And we do the ride and we remain completely silent the whole ride. And then we get back to our start, finish point. And then at that point, inevitably people kind of reflect on how the ride went through for them.

53:19

Amanda Gourgue

That's really powerful.

53:20

Jen Dodge

It is, it is. And I've had a lot of people share that with me. I know for me it's, it has a different meaning for me than it would for other people. And it really is just to. To raise awareness and show that we have a right to be out there and to honor those people. So it's the. So one of the things they give us is a poem to read before the ride starts. And inevitably I get teary eyed reading this poem without fail, just again, it's meant to kind of kick the ride off and put people in a place where they're reflecting on it.

54:08

Amanda Gourgue

Gosh. So for those who are concerned, I read a little bit about the ride and I do, I have noticed that some people do not necessarily talk, but you still say like car, like there's still that safety component to the ride. But I get there's no Chatter.

54:29

Jen Dodge

So actually what I do here is I lay down foundation right out of the gate. So, for example, we're going to ride single file so there's never anybody passing anybody. So there's no need to yell car back because I tell everyone, just assume there's a car back. We rely on hand signals to point out, you know, if we're slowing down, if we're turning, if there's something in the road that people need to, you know, have their attention brought to. So we are able to make. We are able to stay completely silent by having those things in place.

55:03

Amanda Gourgue

Oh, wow. That's very dedicated. That's impressive. And I think it's the true honor, the true meaning of this ride. So I think that's all I can say is well done. That is very impressive. So when you. So I guess this event is happening in Littleton?

55:27

Jen Dodge

Yep.

55:28

Amanda Gourgue

Can you give more details of where the meetup is and what your event looks like?

55:34

Jen Dodge

Yes. So I have the support of my local bike shop, which is Littleton Bike and Fitness. So we use their parking lot and there's municipal parking even around the bike shop parking lot. So there's ample parking for people. I ask people to show up around between like 6, 36, 45. There's waivers to sign and just to kind of, you know, ask any questions, things like that. And then like I said, there's. There's certain material that the organizer, the organization asks us to present. And then at 7 o' clock on the dot, we take off. I do recommend lights. Even though we have daylight at that point in the year, I do recommend lights just to draw attention. This year is our first year, actually. That. So Littleton Bike and Fitness sponsored safety vests.

56:31

Jen Dodge

And so this year is the first year that there will be hi vis safety vests for each rider to wear. And it will have the Ride of Silence logo on the back so that anyone driving by will see that logo and hopefully pay attention to it and maybe even pull out their phone and look up and see what Ride of Silence is. And then we do our ride. And around here, I try and keep it because it's so hilly. I try and keep it as flat as I can. And we do about like 5, 6 miles, typically for our distance.

57:10

Amanda Gourgue

That's awesome. I just want to make not light of this. But you said you want the drivers to pull out their phones and take a look.

57:18

Jen Dodge

Not while they're driving. Right.

57:21

Amanda Gourgue

Pull over or when you get to.

57:23

Jen Dodge

Your final desk.

57:27

Amanda Gourgue

Final destination, take a look at what it is and what is the website that someone can go in to take a look at this?

57:32

Jen Dodge

It is literally Ride of silence.

57:35

Amanda Gourgue
So easy.com or.org.

57:38

Jen Dodge

I believe it's dot com. If you give me one quick second, I can confirm that for you. So. And it's actually pretty cool. The. So every year my parents come out and they silently support our ride. So they're out on the course. It's rideofsilence.org actually, my apologies. Rideofsilence.org they come out and they silently support us. And other drivers have pulled over. You know, they've seen us and they've asked my parents, like, what is going on? And my parents tell them all about the riot of silence. So we will still have that every year. They will still come silently cheer us on. But this year we have, through the generosity of Littleton Bike and Fitness, we have those hi vis vests also.

58:29

Amanda Gourgue

That's amazing. Yeah. I'm gonna feel a little strange to see just two people standing quietly as the bike. How can people get involved both as writers or as pedestrians or, you know, spectators? How can someone get involved in your specific one? But then how can others get involved if they're not in the north country?

58:54

Jen Dodge

Literally anybody can register to host this ride. If you go on the rideofsilence.org website, there's a link there to register to become a participant. And you just write down your location. There's no fee to host it. There's. There's nothing. It literally is you. Like, I will type in that, you know. I'm Jen Dodge. We are riding in Littleton, New Hampshire. We leave from Littleton Bike and Fitness. At the end of the ride, they do ask that the organizers log back in and give a little recap. You know, how. What was your distance, how many riders showed up? Attach any photos that maybe you're interested in sharing, and once you've registered for the first ride, every year, they will.

59:41

Jen Dodge

At that point, they will email you and say, you know, do you want to register for the next year's ride so you don't have to keep remembering to go in there every time. Once. Once you're on the list. Anybody around here that you do not need to sign up ahead of time, you literally just show up at the bike shop, like I said, Between 6:30 and 6:45, any bike is welcome. We've had, even though it's on pavement, we've had mountain bikes. Some woman even drove up here, I believe, from Massachusetts to join us. And she had this little tiny folding bike that she brought with her. Some people are on E bikes, some people are on road bikes. There's, you know, you could be on a unicycle. It really doesn't matter. It's just the whole point of showing up and being a presence.

01:00:32

Jen Dodge

Last year, for the first time ever, Littleton Police Department had a police officer join us on a bicycle. And they're actually going to join us again this year as well. So we already have the support of the police department. Ideally, my whole dream, my whole goal is that we would get so big that we would actually need a police car escort on our route to, because we're going to be so big, you know, and we're not there yet, but we're still only, you know, a handful of years into this. So for right now, to have an officer join us on a bike is pretty amazing.

01:01:13

Amanda Gourgue
That is, it's wonderful to have the.

01:01:14

Jen Dodge
Support of the community. Yeah.

01:01:20

Amanda Gourgue
This has been wonderful to learn all about this. I, I, I've learned a lot personally, so I hope our listeners have as well. Is there anything else? What's your last pitch like? Why should somebody get involved?

01:01:35

Jen Dodge
I kind of, this is kind of my plea is that I'm willing to bet most people know a cyclist or love a cyclist or are a cyclist. And, and even if you don't know somebody that's been injured or killed while out there, we're all just one moment away from that happening. And so I feel like let's just keep raising awareness to keep cyclists safe. And so the more people that are out there, the more recognition, the more notice that this organization gets. And I just think it's so powerful. I look at other places that have a really big population, and they have hundreds of riders show up to their ride of silence, and I just think that is absolutely amazing to show support for cyclists that are in your life.

01:02:23

Amanda Gourgue
I love that. That's awesome. So everybody sign up. Go to Littleton or ride in your own neighborhood. Visit rideofsilence.org and be part of this powerful ride.

01:02:39

Jen Dodge
Awesome.

01:02:39

Amanda Gourgue
Well, thank you, Jen, for that. I really appreciate it.

01:02:41

Jen Dodge
Absolutely.

01:02:52

Amanda Gourgue
Thank you again for listening to the first Bike Walk alliance of New Hampshire podcast. We are excited to bring you this every month. Let us know if you have a topic you want us to cover. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. We'd love to hear from you. Have a great month.